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(54) Computer system capable of connecting expansion unit.

(57) A personal computer system capable of connecting to an expansion unit is designed to eliminate the need for a user to set the I/O address and interrupt level of an I/O controller to be connected to the expansion unit, thereby reducing the number of tasks to be carried out by the user. Accordingly the BIOS includes a program which checks the mount status of the expansion unit to the system when power is on, and disables an I/O controller incorporated in the computer main frame and sets the I/O controller connected to the expansion unit to the desired configuration upon judging that the expansion unit is mounted. Even when the expansion unit is connected after power is cut off in resume mode, therefore, the expansion unit can be used without forcing the user to set the mode back to a boot mode.

EP 0 443 876 A2

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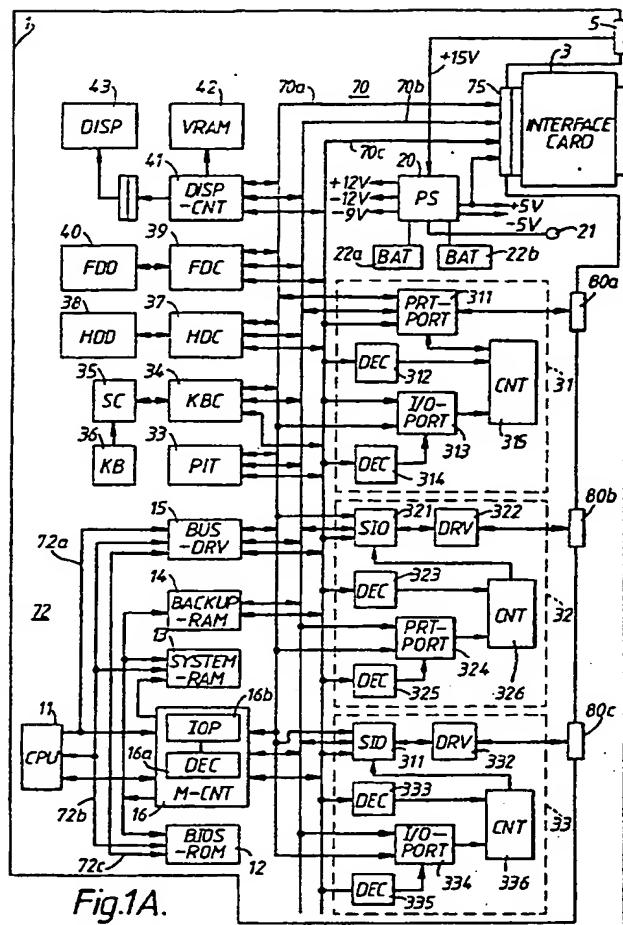


Fig. 1A.

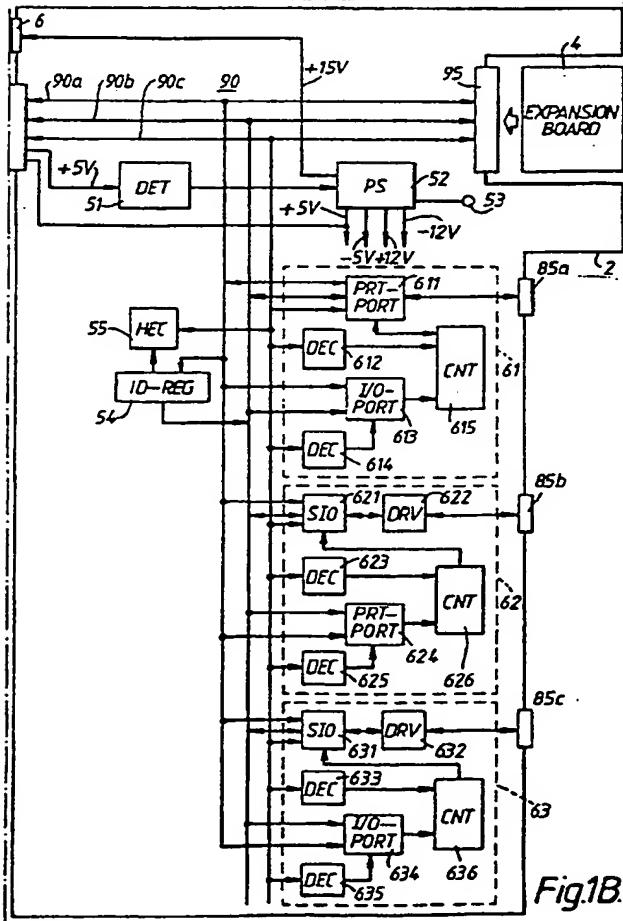


Fig. 1B.

COMPUTER SYSTEM CAPABLE OF CONNECTING EXPANSION UNIT

The present invention relates to a computer system adapted to support an expansion unit.

In the field of personal computers, so-called "laptop" type computers, which are compact, light and convenient to carry around, have become very popular as compared with the conventional desktop type. Such laptop personal computers incorporate many design features intended to improve their ease of operation as well as to reduce the power consumption. The function known as "resume mode operation" is a typical example of such efforts.

"Resume mode" operation is such that when power to the computer mainframe is switched off, information about the input/output (I/O) address and interrupt level of each I/O controller at that time, as well as information from the display screen and various registers, are stored so that when power is resupplied, the computer can resume operation from the same state as immediately before the power cutoff.

A personal computer incorporates I/O controllers, such as a serial input/output (SIO) unit and a printer controller, to allow connection to external I/O devices, such as communication devices and printers. For use with several external I/O devices, the main frame of the personal computer is connected in these I/O devices via cables or the like. When the personal computer is of a portable type and one wants to carry it around and use it alone, these cables must all be removed. When the user wants to use the I/O devices again, the user must connect several cables again accordingly. The number of external I/O controllers, such as an option card, connectable to the main frame is limited so that there is a limit to the number of I/O devices that can be connected.

To overcome these shortcomings, expansion units have been developed, which are connectable via a single cable to the computer main frame, and are equipped with I/O controllers equivalent to those incorporated in the main frame to permit connection of several I/O devices. Thus when it is desired to use the personal computer separately only a single cable has to be disconnected. Further, several external I/O controllers can be connected to the expansion unit.

The personal computer has hardware (I/O configuration controller) which permits the CPU to set the I/O address, interrupt level, etc. of each I/O controller. The personal computer holds information about the address and interrupt level of each I/O controller, which have been set by a user with the help of a hardware configuration setup program, and can use the I/O controllers with that setting unless the setting is changed.

In using the conventional expansion unit having no hardware such as the I/O configuration controller, when a user wants to set the I/O address, interrupt

level, etc. of each I/O controller in the expansion unit to the desired setting, the user must operate switch or other setting devices on the expansion unit to make the settings.

Using the above conventional system, although the user of the expansion unit has less need to connect and disconnect cables, he still has to set the I/O address, interrupt level, etc. of each I/O controller in the expansion unit, using the manual switches or the like provided on the expansion unit.

In addition, with the conventional structure, even when the expansion unit is connected after the power of the personal computer having been used as a stand-alone type is cut off in resume mode, and the power is given again, the hardware configuration at the time of the power cutoff sets up the computer as having no expansion unit. Accordingly, even though the expansion unit is actually connected, the I/O address, interrupt level, etc. of each I/O controller in the case of the expansion unit disconnected will be set in the main frame, inhibiting the use of the I/O controllers of the expansion unit. When the user wants to use the I/O controllers in the expansion unit, therefore, he must

change the mode of the computer to the boot mode, then put power on.

The present invention seeks to provide a personal computer capable of connecting to an expansion unit, which eliminates the need for a user to set the I/O address, interrupt level, etc. of an I/O controller in the expansion unit, thereby reducing the tasks to be carried out by the user.

It is another object of this invention to provide a personal computer system which does not force the user to reboot the system even when an expansion unit is connected after power cutoff in resume mode, thereby allowing the user to use the expansion unit in resume mode.

An expandable computer system according to the present invention therefore seeks to provide a computer main frame and an expansion unit adapted to be connected via interface means to the personal computer main frame.

Accordingly the present invention provides a computer main frame having a plurality of main elements, an expansion unit having a plurality of expansion elements, interface means for connecting said expansion unit to said computer main frame, and system configuration control means, incorporated in each of said computer main frame and said expansion unit, for setting at least address data of input/output devices to be respectively installed in said computer main frame and said expansion unit, thereby permitting said input/output devices to be used by said computer system.

Preferably, the personal computer main frame

incorporates program executing means, which checks the mount status of the expansion unit to the system upon power ON, acquires a status from a memory when the expansion unit is not mounted, and sets an I/O controller to be connected to the main frame to the desired configuration in accordance with the acquired status. When the expansion unit is mounted, the program executing means disables an I/O controller incorporated in the main frame, acquires a status from the memory and sets the I/O controller connected to the expansion unit to the desired configuration.

With the above arrangement, when the expansion unit is simply connected to the personal computer system, a BIOS (Basic Input/Output System) ROM can automatically set the hardware configuration, such as the I/O address and interrupt level of the I/O controller in the expansion unit, equal to the configuration of the computer main frame. The expansion unit can therefore be used without forcing a user to set the mode back to the boot mode. This can eliminate the troublesome procedure of connecting the expansion unit with the resume mode set, setting the mode to the boot mode when the power is supplied, cutting off the power again, then supplying the power again.

One embodiment of the invention will now be described by way of example with reference to the accompanying drawings in which :

Figs. 1A and 1B are block diagrams showing an arrangement of a computer system according to the embodiment of the present invention ; and

Figs. 2 and 3 are flow charts of the process of automatic configuration control.

Referring to Fig. 1, a computer system of one embodiment comprises a computer main frame 1 of a laptop type which can be powered by a battery, an expansion unit 2 which can be connected to the computer main frame 1, an interface card 3, and an expansion board 4.

When the expansion unit 2 is to be used, the interface card 3 is connected to an expansion bus connector 75 of the computer main frame 1. The expansion unit 2 is then connected to the computer main frame 1 through the interface card 3.

The expansion board 4 is selectively connected to an expansion bus connector 95 of the expansion unit 2.

In the computer main frame 1, the respective components are directly or indirectly connected to each other through a system bus 70 (a control bus 70a, a data bus 70b, and an address bus 70c). The respective components will be described below.

A BIOS-ROM (read only memory) 12 stores programs and the like for controlling selection of I/O interfaces to be used. When the expansion unit 2 is to be connected, the I/O interface of the expansion unit 2 is used in place of the I/O interface of the computer main

frame1, as will be described later.

A system RAM (random access memory) 13 stores programs and data to be processed.

A backup RAM 14 stores data and the like when resume processing is performed. Note that while the system power supply is turned off, power is supplied to the backup RAM 14 in order to back up stored data and the like.

A bus driver (BUS-DRV) 15 is arranged between a CPU bus 72 (a control bus 72a, a data bus 72b, and an address bus 72c) and the system bus 70 so as to perform data transmission/reception therebetween.

A memory controller (M-CNT) 16 performs access control with respect to the ROM 12 and the RAMs 13 and 14 under the control of the CPU 11. Note that the memory controller 16 includes an address decoder (DEC) 16a for outputting a selection signal to the RAM 14 upon detection of an address designating the RAM 14, and an I/O port (IOP) 16b for performing enable/disable control of the address decoder 16a.

A power supply (PS) 20 applies DC operating voltages (+12 V, -12 V, -9 V, +5 V, and -5V) to the respective components by using a DC voltage (+15 V) from a power supply adapter (not shown) or the expansion unit 2 connected to a power supply connector 5. In addition, a voltage (+5 V) from the power supply 20 is applied as an operation check signal to a power supply (PS) 52 of the expansion unit 2 through the interface card 3.

That is, if the expansion unit 2 is not connected to the computer main frame 1, the power supply connector 5 is connected to the power supply adapter, and a DC output voltage (+15 V) from the power supply adapter is applied to the power supply 20. If the expansion unit 2 is connected, the power supply connector 5 is connected to a power supply connector 6 of the expansion unit 2, and DC power (+15V) is supplied from the power supply 52 to the power supply 20. In this case, a DC output voltage (+15 V) is applied from the power supply adapter to the power supply 52. A switch 21 is used to turn on and off the power supply 20.

Batteries (BATs) 22a and 22b can be separately detached and serve to supply power to the power supply 20.

A printer interface 31 is arranged between the system bus 70 and a printer connector 80a so as to transmit/receive data to/from a device such as a printer connected to the printer connector 80a. Note that the printer interface 31 includes a printer port (PRT-PORT) 311 for transmitting/receiving data to/from a device such as a printer connected to the printer connector 80a, an address decoder (DEC) 312 for detecting the port address of the printer port 311, and I/O port (I/O-PORT) 313 for outputting data for controlling the printer port 311, an address decoder (DEC) 314 for detecting the port address of the I/O

port 313, and a controller (CNT) 315 for controlling the printer port 311 in accordance with data output from the I/O port 313 and a selection signal supplied from the address decoder 312 upon detection of a port address.

A first RS-232C interface 32 is arranged between the system bus 70 and RS-232C connector 80b so as to transmit/receive data and the like to/from a device connected to the RS-232C connector 80b. Note that the RS-232C interface 32 includes a serial I/O port (SIO) 321 for transmitting/receiving data the like to/from a device connected to the RS-232C connector 80b, a driver (DRV) 322, an address decoder (DEC) 323 for detecting the port address of the serial I/O port 321, an I/O port (I/O-PORT) 324 for outputting data for controlling the serial I/O port 321, an address decoder (DEC) 325 for detecting the port address of the I/O port 324, and a controller (CNT) 326 for controlling the serial I/O port 321 in accordance with data output from the I/O port 324 and a selection signal supplied from the address decoder 323 upon detection of a port address.

A second RS-232C interface 33 is arranged between the system bus 70 and the RS-232C connector 80c so as to transmit/receive data and the like to/from a device connected to the RS-232C connector 80c. Note that the second RS-232C interface 33 has the same arrangement as that of the first RS-232C interface 32. That is, the second RS-232C interface 33 includes a serial I/O port (SIO) 331, a driver (DRV) 332, an address decoder (DEC) 333, an I/O port (I/O-PORT) 334, an address decoder (DEC) 335, and a controller (CNT) 336.

In addition, the computer main frame 1 includes a programmable interval timer (PIT) 33 which can be set by a program, a keyboard controller (KBC) 34, a scan controller (SC) 35, a keyboard (KB) 36, a hard disk controller (HDC) 37, a hard disk drive (HDD) 38, a floppy disk controller (FDC) 39, a floppy disk drive (FDD) 40, a display controller (DISP-CNT) 41, a video RAM (VRAM) 42 capable of data backup during a power-OFF period, and a display unit (DISP) 43 constituted by a plasma display or the like.

In the expansion unit 2, the respective components are directly or indirectly connected to each other through a system bus 90 (a control bus 90a, a data bus 90b, and an address bus 90c). Note that the system bus 90 is connected to the system bus 70 of the computer main frame 1 through the interface card 3. The respective components of the expansion unit 2 will be described below.

Upon reception of an operation check signal (+5 V) from the power supply 20 of the computer main frame 1 through the interface card 3, a voltage detector (DET) 51 outputs a power supply enable signal to the power supply enable signal to the power supply (PS) 52.

The power supply 52 comprises an AC/DC con-

verter 52a, a power supply controller 52b, and a constant voltage circuit 52c, as shown in Fig. 1.

5 The AC/DC converter 52a rectifies/smooths a commercial AC voltage from the power supply adapter and generates a DC voltage (+15 V, +12 V, -12 V, +5 V, and -5 V).

10 The constant voltage circuit 52c supplies DC operating voltages (+12 V, -12 V, +15 V, and -15 V) from the AC-DC converter 52a to the respective components of the expansion unit 2, and supplies a DC voltage (+15 V) to the power supply 20 of the computer main frame 1.

15 The power supply controller 52b controls supply of DC voltages from the constant voltage circuit 52c. More specifically, no DC operating voltage (+12 V, -12 V, +5 V, and -5 V) are supplied to the respective components of the expansion unit 2 until a power supply enable signal from the voltage detector (DET) 51 is received.

20 A switch 53 is used to turn on and off the power supply 52 of the expansion unit 2.

An ID register (ID-REG) 54 is connected to the system bus 90 of the expansion unit 2 so as to store unit ID data inherent in the expansion unit 2. A port address assigned to the I/O port of each I/O interface of the expansion unit 2 can be recognized by referring to this unit ID data.

25 An address decoder (DEC) 55 performs address detection with respect to the ID register 54.

30 A printer interface 61 is arranged between the system bus 90 and a printer connector 85a so as to transmit/receive data and the like to/from a device such as a printer connected to the printer connector 85a. Note that the printer interface 61 has the same arrangement as that of the printer interface 31 and hence includes a printer port (PRT-PORT) 611, an address decoder (DEC) 612, an I/O port (I/O-PORT) 613, an address decoder (DEC) 614, and a controller (CNT) 615.

35 40 A first RS-232C interface 62 is arranged between the system bus 90 and an RS-232C connector 85b so as to transmit/receive data and the like to/from a device connected to the RS-232C connector 85b. In addition, a second RS-232C interface 63 is arranged

45 between the system bus 90 and an RS-232C connector 85c so as to transmit/receive data and the like to/from a device connected to the RS-232C connector 85c. Note that the RS-232C interface 62 and 63 have the same arrangement as that of the RS-232C interfaces 32 and 33 hence respectively include serial I/O ports (SIOs) 621 and 631, drivers (DVRs) 622 and

50 632, address decoders (DECs) 623 and 633, I/O ports (I/O-PORTs) 624 and 634, address decoders (DECs) 625 and 635, and controllers (CNTs) 626 and 636.

55 55 Fig. 2 is a flow chart illustrating the operation according to this embodiment.

Referring to this diagram, step a is for judging whether or not the expansion unit 2 is connected to

the computer main frame 1 based on connection/disconnection data set in the ID register 54. Step b is for branching two different steps depending on whether the expansion unit 2 is connected or not. Step c is for reading status data from the backup RAM 14 when the expansion unit 2 is not connected; the status data is configuration data for setting the I/O address, interrupt level, etc. Step d is for setting the configuration of the computer main frame in accordance with the status data read out in step c. Step e is for disabling the configuration setting of the I/O device by the computer main frame 1 to inhibit the operation of the I/O controllers 31, 32 and 33. Step f, identical to step c, is for reading status data. Step g is for effecting I/O setup to the expansion unit 2.

The operation of this embodiment illustrated in Figs. 1A and 1B will, now be described referring to the flow chart shown in Fig. 2.

The operation of this embodiment illustrated in Figs. 1A and 1B will now be described referring to the flow chart shown in Fig. 2.

The CPU 11, which performs the general control of this system, is connected via the system bus 70 of the main frame with the BIOS ROM 12, the backup RAM 14, etc.

The BIOS ROM 12 is a non-volatile memory holding a program to execute control at the time of initializing or setting up each hardware when the power of the system is given. The backup RAM 14 holds information (status) necessary for setting the hardware as well as the resume data, and these information are backed up by the power from a backup battery (not shown). Setup information is stored as the status data in the backup RAM 14. This status data will be set by a user with the help of a program, such as a hardware setup program.

First, it is discriminated from the content of the ID register 54 whether or not the expansion unit 2 is considered to the main frame 1 of the personal computer (step a). Supposing that data "AA" has been acquired from the register 54, the expansion unit 2 is considered to be connected to the computer main frame 1 in this case; the expansion unit 2 is not considered to have the connection otherwise.

Processing is then executed according to the information about the connection/disconnection of the expansion unit 2 (step b). If the expansion unit 2 is not connected, the status data is read out from the backup RAM 14 (step c), in accordance with the status, the computer main frame 1 is set to the desired configuration (step d). As a result, for example, the I/O address of the printer interface 31 is set at the address "A," the I/O address of the RS-232C interface 32 at the address "B," and the I/O address of the RS-232C interface 33 at the address "i." These I/O controllers 31 to 33 function in accordance with the configuration set by the computer main frame 1.

When the expansion unit 2 is connected to the

computer main frame 1, the configuration setup by the computer main frame 1 will be disabled (step e), thus disabling the I/O controllers 31-33.

Then, as in step c, the status data is read out from the backup RAM 14 (step f). In accordance with this status, the expansion unit 2 is set up for the desired configuration as done in step d (step g). Consequently, the expansion unit 2 has been set up properly in place of the computer main frame 1.

Accordingly, the user can set up the expansion unit 2 in the same configuration as that of the computer main frame 1 by simply connecting the expansion unit to the main frame 1 and without requiring special setup procedures. In this manner, the expansion unit 2 can be used as in the case where the I/O devices are used by the computer main frame alone. The above feature can relieve the user of performing the troublesome task of setting the I/O address, interrupt level and the like of the expansion unit 2.

Fig. 3 is a flow chart illustrating the operation of another embodiment according to the present invention. This embodiment shown in Fig. 3 is premised on a personal computer system capable of connecting an expansion unit to a personal computer which supports a resume mode that permits execution of a program from the program status immediately before the previous power cutoff when power is given again. Therefore, in the BIOS-ROM 12 is provided a program for supporting the resume mode, which saves the program status immediately before power cutoff in advance in the backup RAM 14, and reads it at the time of the next power ON, then resumes the execution of the program. This processing is simply referred to as "resume process" in Fig. 3.

Referring to this diagram, step a is for judging whether or not the expansion unit 2 is connected to the computer main frame 1 based on the content of the ID register 54 incorporated in the expansion unit 2, then branching to different steps depending on the result of the decision. In step b, configuration information, such as I/O addresses, interrupt levels and the like assigned to the I/O controllers for SIO, printer (PRT), etc., which is stored in the backup RAM 14, is set in an I/O configuration control register (not shown) located in the computer main frame 1. Step c is for disabling the I/O controllers 31, 32 and 33, for the SIO, printer (PRT), etc. incorporated in the computer main frame 1, using the I/O configuration control register. Step d following step c is for setting the configuration information, such as I/O address, interrupt levels and the like of the I/O controllers for SIO, printer (PRT), etc., which is stored in the backup RAM 14, into an I/O configuration control register incorporated in the expansion unit 2.

The BIOS ROM 12, a non-volatile memory, holds a resume mode processing program to set each hardware configuration, the contents of various types of special registers, and the display screen to what

they have been at the previous power cutoff, when power for the system is given again. The backup RAM 14 has an area allocated to save information, such as each hardware configuration, the contents of various types of special registers, and the display screen. Setup information, which is to be set in the I/O configuration control register incorporated in the computer main frame 1 or the I/O configuration control register incorporated in the expansion unit 2 is also stored in the backup RAM 14. These information will be stored in the backup RAM 14 when power is cut off in resume mode.

The I/O configuration control register in the computer main frame 1 and the one in the expansion unit 2 have equivalent functions, and serve to control the hardware configuration for determining the I/O addresses of the individual I/O controllers 31, 32, 33, 61, 62 and 63 as well as their interrupt levels. The I/O configuration control register have a function to disable the I/O controllers which are controlled by the above I/O controllers. The I/O controllers 31 and 61 have equivalent functions. So do the I/O controllers 32 and 62, and the I/O controllers 33 and 63. These I/O controllers are for I/O devices, such as the printer (PRT) and SIO.

The following describes the resume processing of the expansion unit.

First, reading out information set in the ID register 54 in the expansion unit 2, the CPU 11 discriminates whether or not the expansion unit 2 is connected to the computer main frame 1 (step a in Fig. 3). Supposing that data "AA" has been written in the ID register 54, the CPU 11 considers that the expansion unit 2 is connected to the computer main frame 1 ; the CPU 11 does not consider the expansion unit 2 connected to the main frame otherwise.

Different processes will be executed depending on the information about the connection/disconnection of the expansion unit 2. If the expansion unit 2 is not connected, the status data is read out from the backup RAM 14, and the configuration of the I/O configuration control register in the computer main frame 1 is set to the desired setting (step b in Fig. 3). As a result, for example, the I/O address of the SIO controller 62 is set at the address "A," and the I/O address of the PRT controller 61 at the address "B." These I/O controllers 61 and 62 function in accordance with the configuration set by the computer main frame 1.

When the expansion unit 2 is connected to the computer main frame 1, the controllers 31, 32 and 33 for the SIO and printer (PRT) are disabled by the I/O configuration control register in the computer main frame 1 (step d in Fig. 3). Then, as in above step b, the status data is read out from the backup RAM 14, and the controllers 61, 62 and 63 for the SIO and printer (PRT) are set to the desired configuration by the I/O configuration control register on the side of the expansion unit 2 as done in the above step b (step d

in Fig. 3).

Through the above processing, the user can set up the the configuration of the SIO, printer (PRT), etc. on the side of the expansion unit in the same configuration as that of the SIO, printer (PRT), etc. in the computer main frame 1 by simply connecting the expansion unit to the main frame 1 and without requiring special setup procedures.

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10 Claims

1. A computer system comprising :
 - a computer main frame having a plurality of main elements ;
 - an expansion unit having a plurality of expansion elements ;
 - interface means for connecting said expansion unit to said computer main frame ; and
 - system configuration control means, incorporated in each of said computer main frame and said expansion unit, for setting at least address data of input/output devices to be respectively installed in said computer main frame and said expansion unit, thereby permitting said input/output devices to be used by said computer system.
2. A computer system according to claim 1, wherein said system configuration control means includes :
 - power-backup memory means for storing setup data ; and
 - program executing means for checking a mount status of said expansion unit to said computer system when power is on, acquiring said setup data from said memory means and setting said computer system to a desired configuration when said expansion unit is not mounted, and disabling an input/output configuration controller of said computer main frame, acquiring said setup data from said memory means, then setting an input/output configuration controller of said expansion unit to a desired configuration when said expansion unit is mounted.

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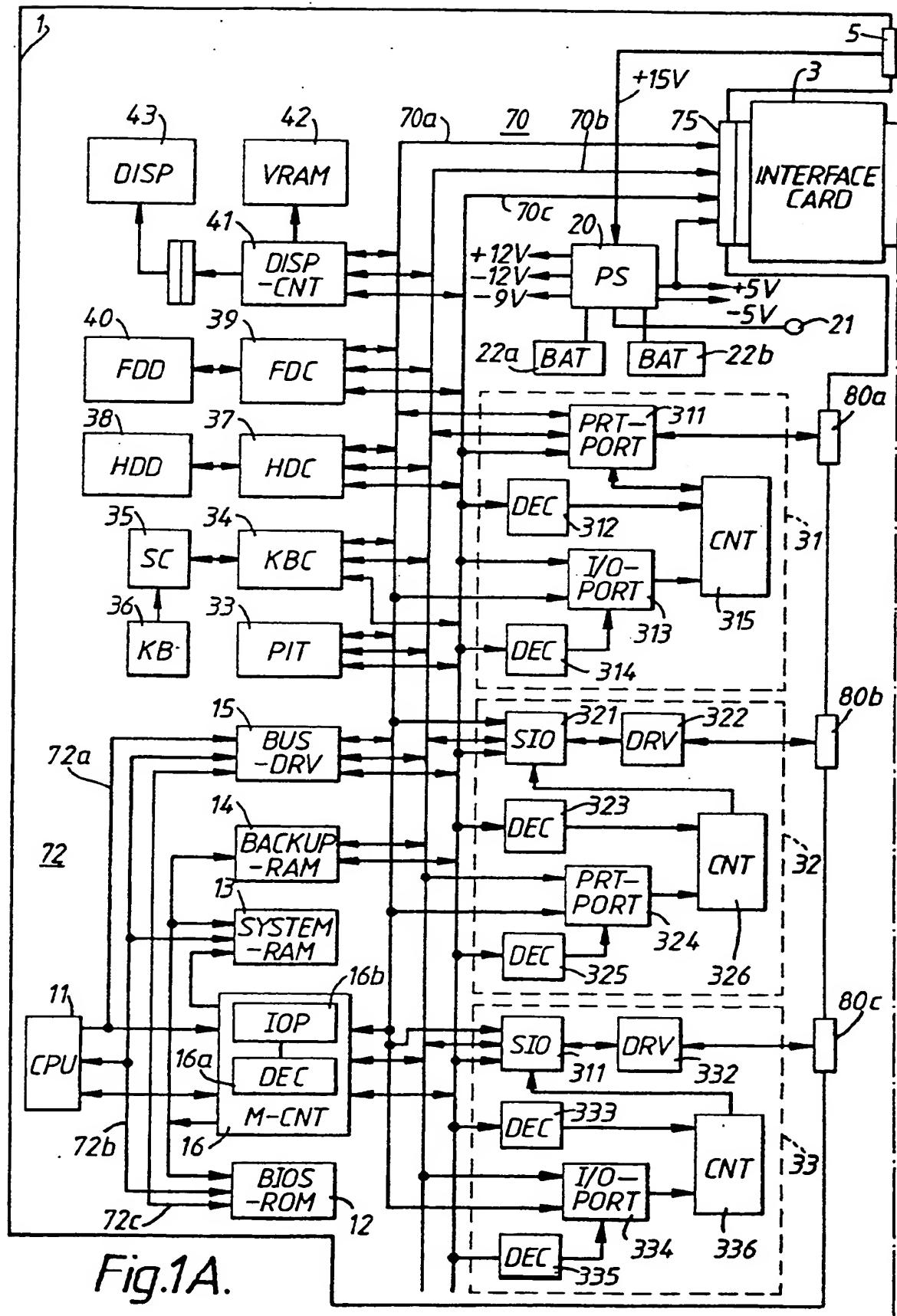


Fig. 1A.

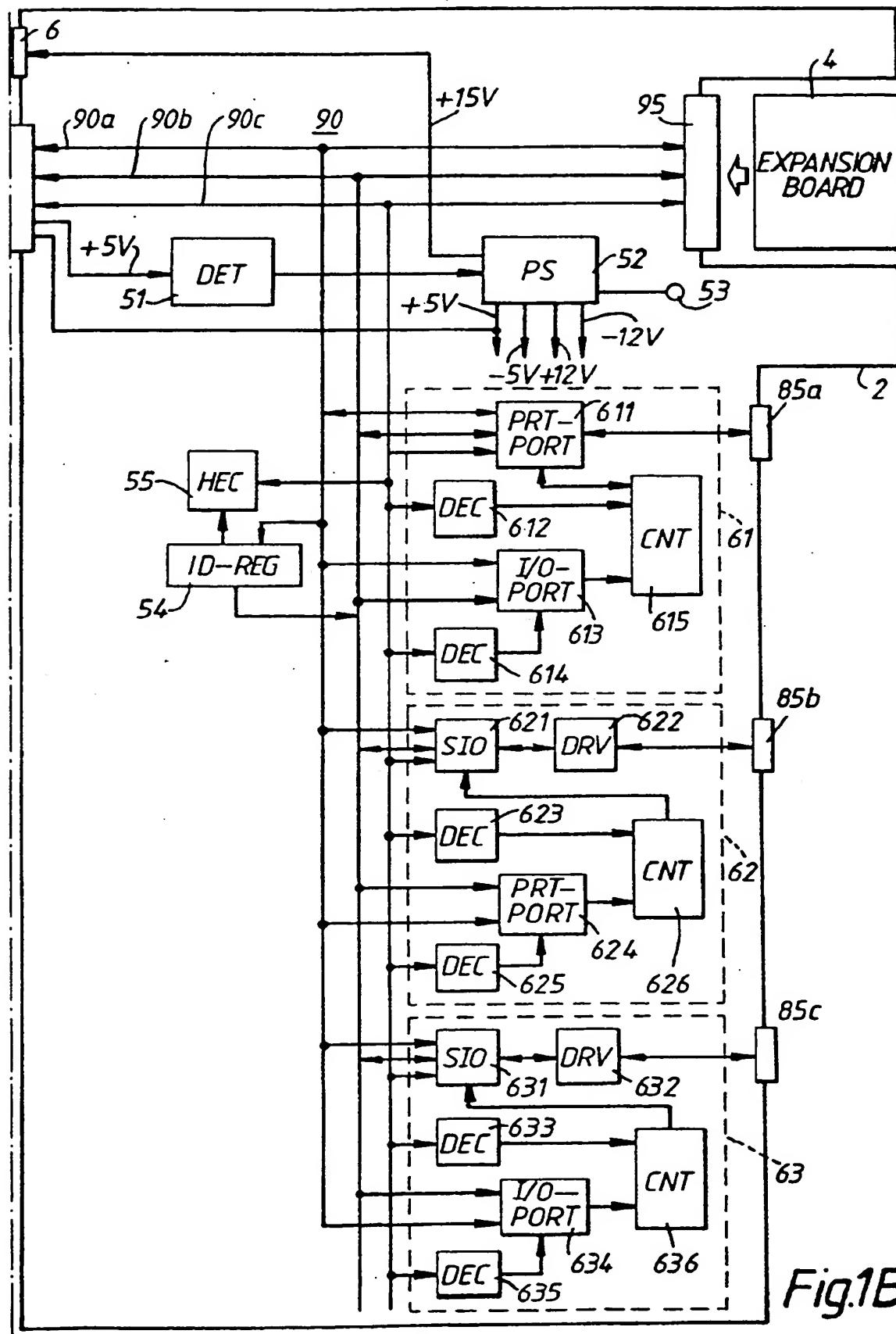


Fig.1B.

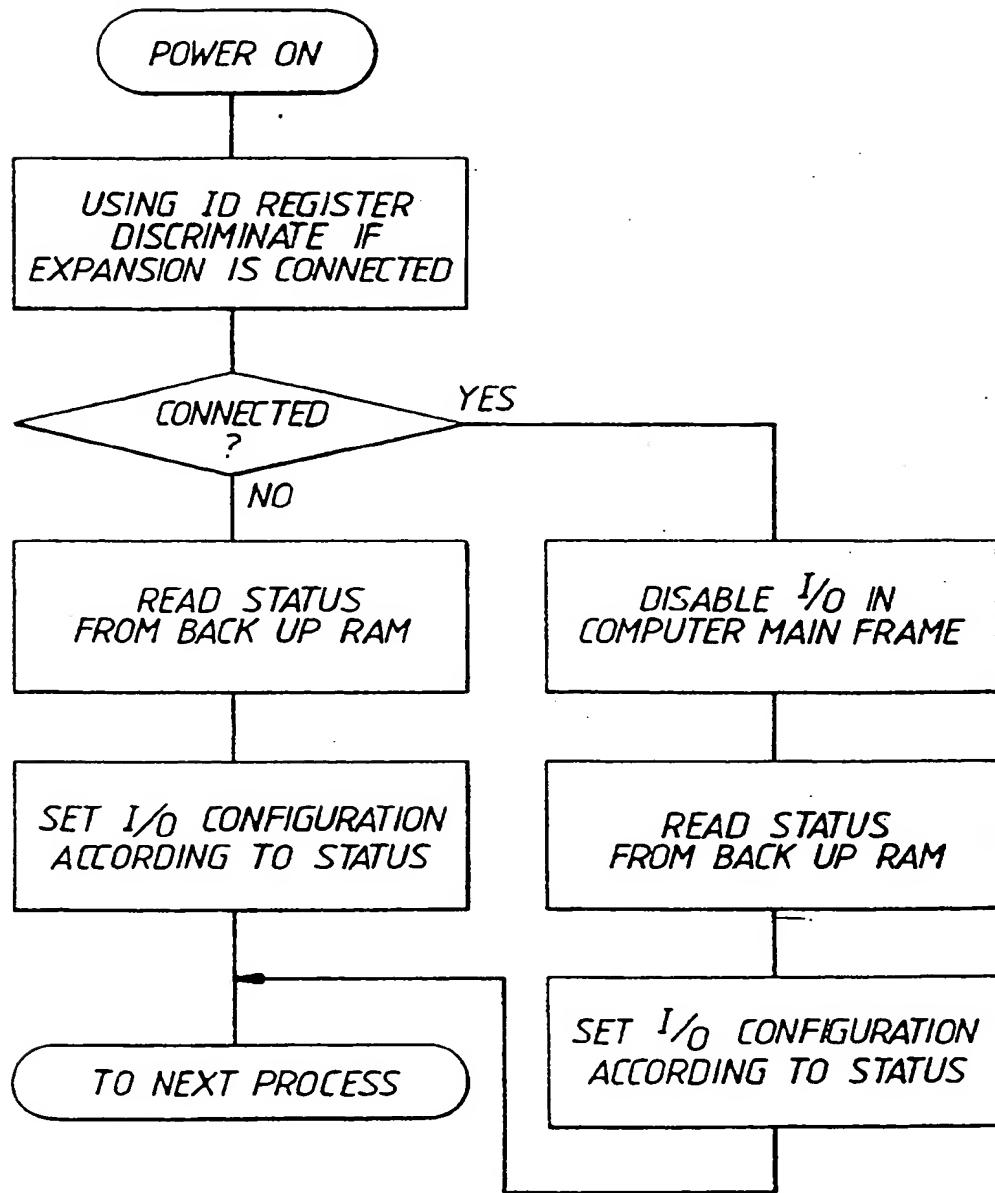


Fig.2.

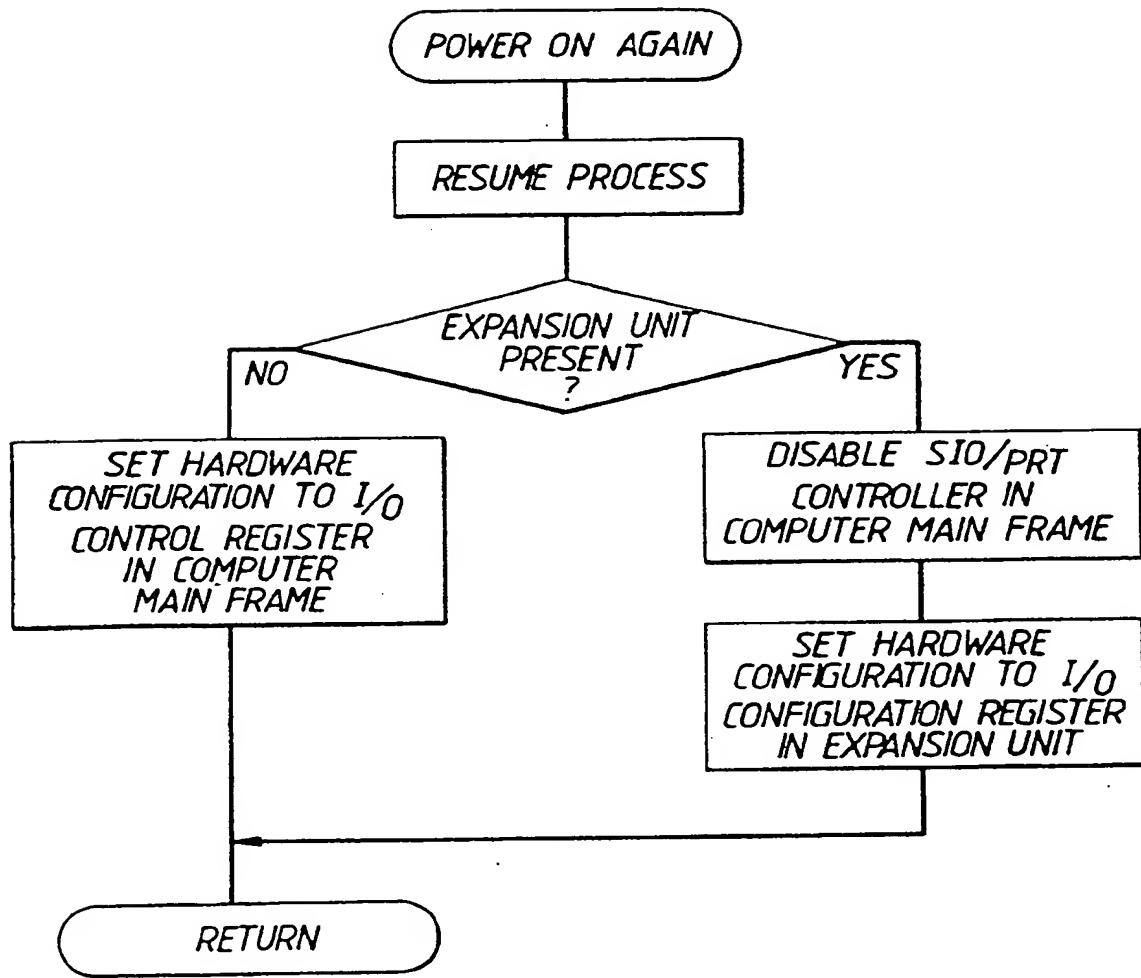


Fig.3.



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EP 0 443 876 A3

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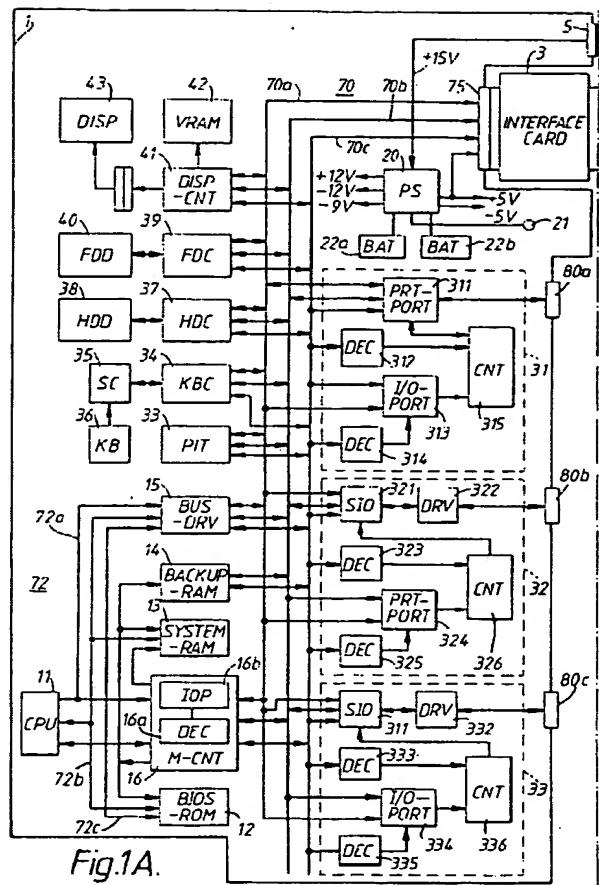


Fig.1A.

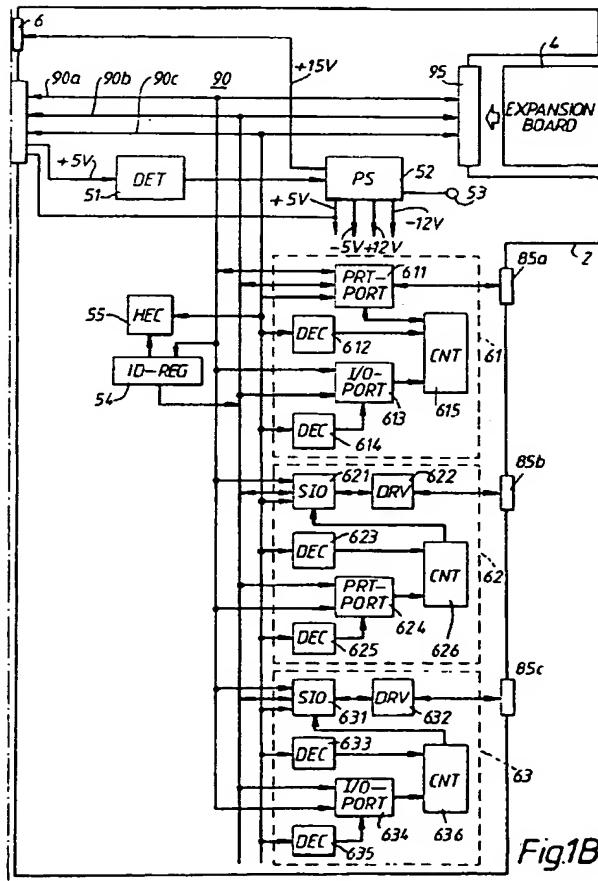


Fig.1B.



European Patent
Office

EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

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DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT									
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int. Cl.5)						
X	EP-A-0 281 999 (IBM CORP.) * Whole document * ---	1,2	G 06 F 12/06						
A	PATENT ABSTRACTS OF JAPAN, vol. 6, no. 41 (P-106)[919], 13th March 1982; & JP-A-56 157 554 (HITACHI SEISAKUSHO K.K.) 04-12-1981 * Abstract * ---	1,2							
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TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int. Cl.5)									
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<p>The present search report has been drawn up for all claims</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 33%;">Place of search</td> <td style="width: 33%;">Date of completion of the search</td> <td style="width: 34%;">Examiner</td> </tr> <tr> <td>THE HAGUE</td> <td>27-09-1991</td> <td>SEMPLE M.</td> </tr> </table>				Place of search	Date of completion of the search	Examiner	THE HAGUE	27-09-1991	SEMPLE M.
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